

EPA COMMENTARY

G. Tracy Mehan III

Help Celebrate Lakes Awareness Month in July 2003

October 18, 2002 marked the 30th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. On that day, President Bush noted both the progress we have made in improving the overall health of our nation's waters and the need to "recommit" to address the challenges ahead. The president proclaimed the next 12 months to be designated the "Year of Clean Water."



For my family, "clean water" means a gorgeous lake in northern Wisconsin where we have the privilege of spending time each summer. Many Americans share this wonderful experience.

As stewards of lakes and reservoirs, you are aware that these water bodies still face many challenges. The Clean Water Act calls for states (including territories and authorized tribes) to report on the status of their water bodies every two years. In the case of lakes, states assessed about 43% of the 40.6 million acres of lakes in the Nation during 2000—e.g., 17.3 million acres out of a total of 40.6 million lake acres. States reported that 55% of their assessed 17.3 million lake acres have good water quality. However, they also reported that some form of pollution or habitat degradation impairs the remaining 45% of the assessed lake acres.

Recognizing the remaining challenges that lakes and other water bodies face, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been featuring specific topics such as nonpoint sources, storm water, oceans,

drinking water, and other themes each month as part of the celebration and recommitment in this "Year of Clean Water."

I am pleased to announce that July 2003 will be "Lakes Awareness Month." As part of Lakes Awareness Month, we have prepared, with great support from many in the lakes community, a number of outreach materials and a display that we will be circulating around EPA headquarters and to other venues. We hope that Lakes Awareness Month will help raise awareness of the special value of lakes and the protection they need. Lakes Awareness Month also provides an opportunity to put the "spotlight" on several projects that we have been proud to cosponsor with the North American Lake Management Society (NALMS). I also want to thank NALMS for suggesting that lakes be highlighted as one of the themes for the "Year of Clean Water."

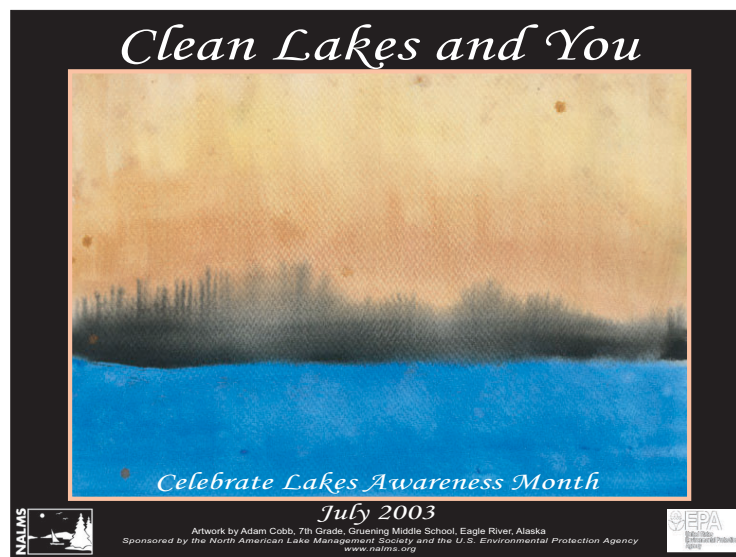
"Clean Lakes and You" is the Slogan for Lakes Awareness Month

I understand that NALMS members and others participated in a lively discussion to select a slogan for Lakes Awareness Month. I applaud your selection of the slogan "Clean Lakes and You." This slogan emphasizes a key message—that you can make a

difference. The slogan stresses the importance of individual stewardship in protecting and restoring lakes and reservoirs. This slogan will be highlighted on the outreach materials and the display we develop—as well as on NALMS' poster for Lakes Awareness Month.

NALMS' Lakes Awareness Month Poster

For the past five years, we have provided support for NALMS' Lake Appreciation Week, which draws attention to the value and importance of lakes and reservoirs. I understand that each year NALMS conducts a competition among school children to find the best poster. This year's poster was prepared by Adam Cobb, a middle school student in Eagle River, Alaska. His beautiful poster is shown on the cover of this month's *LakeLine* magazine. As part of Lakes Awareness Month, EPA will be proud to distribute this poster along with other outreach materials. The back of the poster



includes many ideas for promoting Lakes Awareness Month, including ideas such as organizing a lakeshore cleanup day or contacting your local newspaper or radio station to provide information on your lake.

Great North American Secchi Dip-In

EPA has also been proud to provide support for ten years for the conduct of the Great North American Secchi Dip-In, which has been held annually since 1994. The Dip-In concept is simple: individuals in volunteer monitoring programs take a transparency measurement (usually with a Secchi disk) on one day during the period surrounding Canada Day and July Fourth. These Secchi transparency values are used to assess the transparency of volunteer-monitored lakes in the United States and Canada. Dr. Robert Carlson and his colleagues at Kent State University, along with NALMS, have spearheaded the Dip-In since its inception and have done a great job with this project.

The Dip-in is a wonderful demonstration of the potential of volunteer monitors in gathering environmentally important information on our lakes and reservoirs. This year's Dip-In will be from June 28 to July 13. For more information on the Dip-in, please visit the Web site developed by Dr. Carlson and his colleagues at: <http://dipin.kent.edu/>.

Clean Lakes Program Provided Early Demonstration of the Value of a Watershed Approach

While not strictly a part of Lakes Awareness Month, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge that the section 314 Clean Lakes Program has been a trendsetter in watershed protection over the years, fostering an integrated, holistic approach to address all the important sources of pollution and involving grass-roots organizations to protect "their" lake. The Clean Water Act section 314 Clean Lakes Program really provided EPA's first demonstration of the watershed approach—which we are emphasizing even more today. State lake managers, NALMS members, lake associations, and others helped demonstrate the value

of focusing efforts on specific lake watersheds and the "power of place" long before this concept was popular.

As many of you know, the Clean Lakes Program provides a framework for assessing the status of the water quality of all lakes and reservoirs in a state—these studies are referred to as *Lake Water Quality Assessment Projects*. The Clean Lakes Program also provides a framework for identifying and evaluating all the sources of pollution in a lake's (or reservoir's) watershed—this is referred to as a *Phase 1 – Diagnostic/Feasibility Study*. Many of these Phase I studies have provided the technical basis for developing total maximum daily loads (TMDLs)—which are basically pollution budgets. The Clean Lakes Program also includes *Phase 2– Restoration/Implementation Projects* to implement the recommended options from the Phase 1 study. These options may include *both* watershed practices to control the sources of pollution to a lake or reservoir, as well as in-lake controls. Finally, the Clean Lakes Program provides a framework for monitoring the lake or reservoir after implementation of the Phase 2 study—this is referred to as *Phase 3 – Post-Restoration Monitoring Studies*.

Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant Program Provides Funds for Lakes Work

EPA continues to support implementation of Clean Lakes Program activities such as those described above. Since 1994, we have been funding Clean Lakes Program activities under the Clean Water Act section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant Program. Our section 319 guidance stresses that states should use "at least 5%" of their section 319 grant funds to support Clean Lake Program activities previously funded under the section 314 Clean Lakes Program. We also ask that states report on their lakes-related activities in the section 319 Grants Reporting and Tracking System (GRTS). For FY 2001, information reported in the GRTS system indicates that states used approximately 5.4% of their section 319 funds for Clean Lakes-related projects.

EPA Continuing to Encourage Use of Watershed Approaches

EPA continues to embrace and take steps to encourage use of watershed approaches to better address the complex water quality problems that we face today. I firmly believe that such an approach, which focuses multi-stakeholder efforts within hydrologically defined boundaries to protect and restore our aquatic resources and ecosystems, offers the most cost-effective opportunity to tackle today's challenges. I recently issued a memo called "Committing EPA's Water Program to Advancing the Watershed Approach," which identifies a number of actions we will take to foster watershed approaches (memo posted on EPA's Web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/memo.html>). I urge NALMS and others in the lakes community to give us feedback on the directions outlined in the memo.

Help Celebrate Lakes Awareness Month

We have learned many lessons over the years from working with the lakes community on lakes projects. We hope to continue to work with you all—and hope that you will help celebrate Lakes Awareness Month in your community. I also want to again thank NALMS and others in the lakes community for their help in developing materials for Lakes Awareness Month. We have had a very productive partnership with NALMS over many years, and Lakes Awareness Month is just the latest example this partnership. Hopefully, the spotlight provided by Lakes Awareness Month will help focus more attention on the needs of lakes (and reservoirs), and we can continue this productive partnership to help protect and restore lakes.

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